



# **CALL *BEFORE***





# YOU CUT

by STEVE WESTIN, photos by DAVID STONNER

A forester can help you avoid woodland management mistakes that persist for decades.



**In order to best assess what you have in your woodlot, have a forester come out and conduct an inventory. Consulting forester Art Suchland (right) discusses the options involved in landowner Dean Klohr's property.**

**C**ould you even dream of performing surgery on yourself? Would you undertake legal action without an attorney? How about designing and building a new house without consulting architects or builders? Most folks likely would prefer having professional help, because they know they lack the training and experience to get those jobs done right.

It's a pretty good bet that most landowners would also benefit from expert advice when it comes to managing their woodlands, especially when they are planning a timber harvest.

Caring for your forest is a long-term proposition where one unfortunate decision can have impacts that last for decades.

The Department of Conservation, along with many partners, is launching an information campaign named Call Before You Cut. The program encourages woodland owners to consult with professional foresters or a Professional Timber Harvester or Master Logger before they make decisions about their forestland. A toll-free telephone number (877-564-7483) has

been established through which landowners may request information about caring for their woods and contacting a professional forester or trained logger.

We're also a partner with other states in a Web site ([www.callbeforeyucut.com](http://www.callbeforeyucut.com)) to tell people about forest management, and to provide people with contact information for foresters.

Many states have laws, generally called "forest practices acts," that control various aspects of logging activity on privately owned lands. In Missouri, we rely on people voluntarily practicing good forest management. Outreach efforts, like Call Before You Cut, provides information that enhances people's knowledge of how to take care of their woods.

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of Missouri forests  
are privately owned





We think the effort is worthwhile. Missouri forests (83 percent of which are privately owned) provide important benefits to both the people who own them and society in general. Forested lands play a large role in providing clean air, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, forest products and clean water for all Missourians.

From decades of research, we've learned that active management enhances the values provided by privately held woodlands. We do everything we can to help people keep our forests healthy.

### Getting What You Want

Have you ever thought about what you would most like from your land? This is often the first question a forester asks a landowner when they begin discussing options for woodlands. Are you a hunter? Do you like to photograph birds and other wildlife? Do you just want a peaceful retreat? Do you want to cut some firewood? Would you like your woods to provide periodic income? Are you concerned about maintaining your forest's health?

Once you have a vision of what benefits you would like from your woodlands, you can choose from a variety of management activities that will help you achieve your goals. The good news is that many objectives overlap. A healthy forest provides excellent habitat for animals, is aesthetically pleasing and will produce good wood for heating or wood products.

The next step is assessing what you have in your woodlot. A forester can conduct an overall inventory of your woods to determine the kind and number of trees present, as well as their distribution, health and age. The forester also will identify areas that need special attention, such as bare stream banks or a lack of wildlife habitat.

Once you have determined the goals for your woods and the forester has conducted an inventory, it's time to make a plan. A forest management plan prepared by a professional forester describes the current condition of your woodlands and the trees growing there. It also integrates your objectives with the resources present, spells out activities that will help achieve your goals for your land and can guide you should you decide to harvest some of the timber on your property.

A forester will mark and tally the trees that are to be removed during the sale. This log count



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will allow the forester to develop an estimate of the value of your timber based on current market conditions. The pre-harvest inventory is essential. You know the value of your home, vehicle, livestock and crops. Do you know the value of the trees in your woods? Most people don't.

You can then solicit loggers for bids on the trees you want to sell. The bid process is an amazing thing. There are usually wide differences among bids, and the high bid is often as much as double the low bid. Taking the first offer, no matter how much money it sounds like, is usually not the best idea. It just makes good business sense to advertise the timber sale and get several written bids. This can mean more money in your pocket.

### Sustainable Harvests

A common method of timber harvesting in Missouri is high-grading. This is unfortunate because this practice removes all the good trees from the woods in one harvest, leaving only those that are in poor condition. Those remaining trees grow slowly and limit the landowner's options for decades. High-grading might lead to more immediate financial gain, but it's at the expense of the forest's future potential and health.

A properly conducted harvest removes trees of all sizes, ages and quality, leaving many desir-

able trees while promoting the growth of high-potential younger trees. A well cared for forest provides sustainable woodlands that increase in quality, health and value over time.

Once you and the forester have identified the harvest area and worked out the details of the sale, it's best to develop a harvest plan. The plan should clearly lay out the location of log landings and their treatment, as well as the location of haul roads and skid trails. It should also specify how the trees are to be cut, and the treatment of the logging slash. A good plan will protect the aesthetics, water quality and soil resources of your woodland.

After opening the bids, you and your forester should meet with the logger selected in order to discuss details of the timber sale. The harvest plan will help guide the logger's activities, but you should make sure that all parties are in agreement about the terms of the sale and how it is to be conducted.

A written contract between the landowner and the logger protects the interests of both parties and is essential to a successful timber sale. The contract should specify how the trees are to be cut, the method and timing of payment, the amount of performance bond and numerous other details, such as defining the sale period and the treatment of damages.



You or the forester should periodically monitor progress and adherence to the contract specifications while the timber harvest is in progress. You want to make sure that living trees that are not part of the sale remain undamaged and that the logger stops working during wet weather so that the equipment doesn't create deep ruts in roads and skid trails.

When the timber harvest is complete, the forester should inspect the harvest area to make sure Best Management Practices to prevent soil erosion have been properly installed, that roads and log landings have been rehabilitated to conditions called for in the contract, and to make sure remaining trees are not damaged.

Receiving your payment from the timber harvest and returning the performance bond concludes the timber sale, but there are often

post-sale activities that need to be completed before a timber harvest is truly finished. For example you might need to cut small trees that are not to be a part of the future forest or remove trees damaged during the logging operation. Further work on roads might be necessary, and post-sale is one of the best times to think about improving wildlife habitat.

Managing your woodland can be a rewarding and profitable activity which will enhance its health and productivity, and your enjoyment. A timber harvest can start a new chapter in the history of your woods by removing mature trees, allowing younger trees to grow freely and new trees to start growing. Protect your woodlands for future generations. The best way to begin to manage your forested land is to seek advice from a professional forester. Call Before You Cut! ▲

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